

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS GEM AND MINERAL SOCIETY HISTORY

The first meeting of the Northwest Arkansas Gem and Mineral Society was held May 21, 1968 with nineteen charter members and two guests in attendance. Connie Golden was the first president, Dale Robinson was the first vice-president, and Joyce Moheng was the first secretary/treasurer. At the first meeting Mr. Whitney of Eureka Springs Gem Shop was the guest speaker who spoke of gems as a hobby and about a club for that purpose.

Dean and Ruby Shafer are the only charter members who are still members that have consistently been members the whole time. John Moose joined the club in May 1971 and served as president several years and in many other capacities until his death on March 20, 2017. Larry and Connie McGarrah joined the society in October 1973. Larry served as president several years. Phyllis Thurman joined around the same time but quit for a few years and then rejoined.

Some of the early club meetings were held in different member's homes. The club has met in various locations down through the years: Borderline Group Building, Siloam Springs Community Building, Rodeo Grounds Clubhouse, United Methodist Church and above Dr. John Allison's Dental Office, plus other locations. Field trips have always been a part of the activities. Some of the field trips were to the Tri-State area; Rush area; Mt. Ida; El Dorado, MO; etc. Some areas are now closed to collecting.

The first rock swap was held August 23, 1969, and the club made a profit of \$18.68 from it. From then until 1974, rock swaps were held in even numbered years. The 1976 rock swap was cancelled due to lack of interest, but one was held in 1978. Shows were put on in the Siloam Springs Community Building every odd numbered year from 1968 until 1981. Rental of the Community Building for the 1971 show was \$4.00 per day for a total of \$24.00 for the six days needed to put on the show. Low membership made it hard to put on the 1981 show. Only three of the dealers showed up. We made a profit of \$18.00 above expenses. At least we didn't go in the hole!

The club struggled on during the 1980's in spite of low attendance at the meetings. When we acquired the rooms above Dr. Allison's office, we set up a work room with lapidary equipment. Lessons were given on cabochon making, etc. New members were gained, Stanley and Tim Wolfram among them. It was difficult for anyone physically impaired to climb the stairs to the meeting rooms, so a lot of people who wanted to come, couldn't.

In 1992, the Siloam Springs School Board decided to put the abandoned Prairie View school up for sale by silent bid. Several members said they would donate toward the purchase of the building. In October 1992, we submitted our bid of \$5200 to the Siloam Springs School Board. It was the high bid and was accepted. We painted the outside trim

of the building, and a new roof was installed with the money left over from the purchase price. On September 11, 1993 we held our open house and a rock swap in our own clubhouse! Since then, our membership has increased. We have had a rock swap at the clubhouse in September every year since then. We have had gem and mineral shows most of the years and most of them have been in the Community Building in downtown Siloam Springs.

In September 2007, the club purchased the mobile home and adjacent 1.25 acres of land east of the clubhouse. That expanded our property to 2.25 acres. Because water for the mobile home was piped from the home and business east of the mobile home, we had to have a well drilled. Club members then built a well house and dug water lines to the mobile home and to the clubhouse. Members also installed a restroom in the clubhouse. Rent money from the mobile home enabled us to purchase the workshop building in September 2008. Members can learn how to saw, grind and polish cabochons in the workshop after they learn how to properly use the equipment.

In January 2023, we had a raccoon decide to visit the clubhouse. Apparently he didn't like it because he completely destroyed the drop ceiling and the new blinds that had been installed just a short time before. The raccoon even managed to knock off a petrified dinosaur egg and cause it to crack open. Since the ceiling was old anyway we decided to replace the entire drop ceiling with new panels and new LED lighting. Looked great!

Then in July 2023 we noticed the floor was sagging a little so we called in a company to shore up the floor by replacing joists or jacking up the floor. They discovered a massive amount of termite damage to the floor. We had to have the floor torn out and replaced. We painted the inside of the building and put in new flooring. We removed the wood burning stove that had been our only source of heat and replaced it with two mini-splits. The building looked really good inside. Many dedicated members worked tirelessly on the building to keep it in good shape.

The Northwest Arkansas Gem and Mineral Society has been blessed down through the years with club members who have been willing to serve as officers, board members, workers who help in putting on the rock swaps and rock shows, workers maintaining the property and repairing the buildings, and teaching. Thousands upon thousands of hours have been donated to make this club what it is today. Sometimes money or other items have been donated. Some members have worked in this club for 20, 30 or 40 or more years. Because the society owns land and buildings, it differs from other gem and mineral societies and a lot of other clubs. There are lots of duties in maintaining the land and buildings.

The NWA Gem and Mineral Society will be 57 years old this May, 2025. It is your club! There are lots of places where each and every member can help. We are thankful for every member, and we need every one of you. Learning and participating in events related to the gem and mineral hobby is fun. Working in the club duties can be fun too and makes you feel more a part of this club.

Hopefully, the Northwest Arkansas Gem and Mineral Society can continue on for many more years.